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Grammar Mini-Lesson Assignment

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Instructional Guidelines

Paragraph Usage: Paragraphs are units of composition that help organize ideas so they flow freely from one to the other. Paragraphs may be changed to signify a change in place or time, to show a specific example or idea, or when the speaker changes. Paragraphs allow for the control of ideas; to provide concrete examples, reasons, and illustrations; to comment on ideas and give an opinion; state a main point; and summarize information.

Grade Level Targeted: Any grade level can be targeted for the purpose of this lesson, however this may be more beneficial to grades nine and ten when essay writing is introduced and becomes a requirement in a variety of subjects. By introducing the proper usage of paragraphs in grades nine and ten, it will provide students a good foundation going into grades eleven and twelve when they must write much longer essays and papers.

Common Errors and Corrections: Errors **may** include (but are not limited to) not using paragraphs at all to separate ideas; using paragraphs incorrectly by separating one idea into two or more paragraphs; not using a topic sentence to state the purpose of the paragraph; not using paragraph transitions correctly by failing to signify the start of a new paragraph with transitional words (see examples below).

Corrections **may** include (but are not limited to) controlling the length of the paragraph to state the topic sentence and develop the main idea without getting off track; vary the paragraph length if necessary to prove a point or for effect; breaking long paragraphs up into smaller subtopics to sharpen the focus of the argument/topic; using paragraph transitions correctly by introducing new paragraphs with language that illustrates the direction/change of the topic (for example “also,” “however,” “as a result,” “consequently,” etc.).

Activity:

* Students will be provided an example of proper paragraph usage that shows indentation, the separation of paragraphs by main ideas, the usage of topic sentences, and how to identify paragraph transitions.
* Students will be given a large chunk of text that they must break up into paragraphs. Tips will be provided for guidance as to where/when the paragraph should be broken up and why.
* Teachers who decide to use this activity can customize which paragraphs are used in terms of how they fit into the curriculum (for example if a specific book is being read in class; if the students are learning how to write a research essay; etc.).

Resources:

Brooke, Bob. (2001-2009). Paragraphs and When to Use Them. Retrieved January 25, 2012 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.bobbrooke.com/WritersCorner/paragraphswhentouse.htm>

Whitesmoke, Inc. (2002-2012). How To Use Paragraph Transitions. Retrieved January 25, 2012 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.whitesmoke.com/how-to-use-paragraph-transitions>

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**Paragraph Usage 101: Test Your Knowledge**

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**What are paragraphs and how can we use them?**

* Paragraphs are *units of composition* that help organize ideas
* Paragraphs can be *separated* to show a change in time or place, to show a specific example or idea, or when the speaker changes
* Paragraphs may include a *topic sentence* that indicates the main idea of the paragraph
* Paragraphs can be used to provide concrete examples, reasons, and illustrations; to give an opinion; to state a main point; or simply to summarize information

**For Example:**

Paragraph Indentation (signifies the beginning)

Idea #1: The speaker is discussing having to say goodbye to the history teacher.

*The other reason I wasn't down at the game was because I was on my way to say good-bye to old Spencer, my history teacher.* He had the grippe, and I figured I probably wouldn't see him again till Christmas vacation started. He wrote me this note saying he wanted to see me before I went home. He knew I wasn't coming back to Pencey.

Paragraph Transition (shows a change in topic/subject)

Idea #2: The speaker is discussing getting kicked out of school.

I forgot to tell you about that. *They kicked me out. I wasn't supposed to come back after Christmas vacation on account of I was flunking four subjects and not applying myself and all.* They gave me frequent warnings to start applying myself--especially around midterms, when my parents came up for a conference with old Thurmer – but I didn't do it. So I got the axe. They give guys the axe quite frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic rating, Pencey. It really does.

**Try It Yourself:** Break up the following text into paragraphs. If you see any errors, correct them by pointing to the mistake with an arrow and providing an explanation. Underline the topic sentence (if there is one). Remember the tips given above!

The funny thing is, though, I was sort of thinking of something else while I shot the bull. I live in New York, and I was thinking about the lagoon in Central Park, down near Central Park South. I was wondering if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go. I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away. I'm lucky, though. I mean I could shoot the old bull to old Spencer and think about those ducks at the same time. It's funny. You don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher. All of a sudden, though, he interrupted me while I was shooting the bull. He was always interrupting you. "How do you feel about all this, boy? I'd be very interested to know. Very interested."